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ADDRESS

TO

THE CITIZENS OF WASHINGTON

ON THE

CONDITION OF THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

PUBLISHED BY ORDER OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES:

DECEMBER, 1858.

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DECEMBER, 1858.

The Committee appointed to prepare an address to the public in relation to the Public Schools submitted the following Report, which, having been read, was unanimously adopted ; and ten thousand copies thereof were ordered to be printed for distribution.

JAMES G. BERRET,
Mayor and Ex-officio President.

ROB. RICKETTS, *Secretary.*

ADDRESS.

The Board of Trustees of the Public Schools of Washington beg leave to submit, for the consideration of their fellow-citizens, the following brief statement of the present condition of the schools under their charge, with the view to a more general understanding of the wants and necessities of the system ; and to awaken, if possible, a spirit of generous co-operation and active sympathy with the cause of Public Education : in order that some prompt and effective measures for present relief and future advancement may be devised.

Taking into consideration the many disadvantages under which our system of public instruction has labored from its adoption to the present time, it is matter of just surprise that it should have been able to continue its present organization, and to do as much as it has in dispensing the blessings of a common education to even a portion of our children. Depending entirely for support upon the generosity of the city government and the few thousands collected annually at the polls, it has silently increased, within a few years, from a mere shadow of a system into one of substance and importance, becoming in fact a

permanent element of our social and political organization ; and which we are bound, by every feeling of humanity and patriotism as well as by the true principles of Christian philanthropy, to cherish and advance to the very highest degree of excellence. How can this be most effectually done, is the grave and important question which presents itself for consideration, and which every good citizen is now called upon to investigate and to solve.

The extension of the system, so as to embrace all the advantages of our city's position as the seat of the General Government ; the pressing necessity for greater accommodation ; the want of a Superintendent of Public Instruction ; and, above all, the wretched condition of nearly all of our Public School rooms, absolutely demand the most prompt and energetic action.

Public Education everywhere is, and must be, from its very nature, progressive. The further we advance it, the greater becomes the necessity for increased facilities for its proper administration ; and we cannot pause in our efforts in its behalf, or voluntarily abandon so sacred a cause, without subjecting ourselves to all the evils arising from a want of education among the people, and the consequent prevalence of crime and immorality.

The cause of Public Education in the City of Washington has now reached a point from which it must either be advanced by some active measures of pecuniary relief, or it must, virtually, be abandoned and permitted to fall to ruin and decay ; for it can scarcely be said to do more than exist upon its present limited resources. SHALL WE ADVANCE IT, OR SHALL WE ABANDON IT? Surely there can be no hesitation on the part of an enlightened community like ours in answering such a question as it only should be answered ; and it only remains for those intrusted with the grave and responsible duties of guardians of the Public Schools, to point out the wants of the system in order to obtain the necessary relief. The Board of Trustees, therefore, respectfully submit: *That there is not, at present, either rented from individuals or owned by the city, a single school-room entirely suited for school purposes.*

Without entering into detail or argument to prove this assertion, it is simply necessary to state, that, with but two or three exceptions, the buildings now in use were not *originally* erected for school purposes, but were intended for almost every other object of civilization—such as market houses, stables, &c., &c. Many are in the basements of churches, damp, badly lighted, and imperfectly ventilated, and utterly without play grounds or suitable accommodations.

Since the establishment of Public Schools in 1845, the appropriations for their support have never been sufficient to enable any of the various Boards of Trustees to remedy this evil, and they have, consequently, been obliged to content themselves with such rooms as they could get, no matter what might be their locality, appearance, or fitness for school purposes. To build, is entirely out of the question ; and the result is that scarcely 25 per cent. of the children in the city are now accommodated in public school-rooms.

Wherever Public Schools have been established, it has been found necessary for the successful operation of the systems upon which they

are conducted, that everything connected with them should be of a pleasing and attractive character, from the outward appearance of the school-house, to the most minute detail of the interior arrangements; and it will be found, by an examination of the records of Public Education in other cities of our Republic, that the strictest attention is paid to the proper construction and arrangement of school-houses. In the Report of the City Superintendent of New York, December 31, 1856, in relation to the condition of the Public Schools, we find the following language:

“Our numerous school edifices are, both externally and internally, with few and rapidly decreasing exceptions, spacious, commodious, tasteful, and pleasant; furnished with every convenience requisite to the comfortable accommodation of all, and presenting every inducement to the most careful and considerate parent to place his children within their walls.”

After noticing the order and discipline of the schools, the solemnities observed daily in opening and closing them, the recesses, &c., he continues: “Thus pleasantly and happily the hours pass away in an atmosphere of love, kindness, and improvement; and the acquisition of knowledge is accompanied by the formation of habits of order, industry, punctuality, neatness, and mutual affection and regard. The school-room and its associations are rendered attractive and desirable to all; most attractive and desirable to those who stand most in need of their elevating and refining influences, and who, but for this beneficent agency, might never have known the blessings of a well-ordered and happy home, or participated in the inestimable advantages of a Christian education.” * * * * “Those only who have been familiar with the dreary and repulsive walls, the cheerless and desolate aspect, and the wearisome and monotonous routine of the schools of the olden time; who have witnessed and sympathized with the protracted sufferings of the hapless little ones condemned to pass hours, days, and months of ill-concealed torture on the miserable apologies for benches without backs, and in rooms open to the rudest assaults of the wind and the tempest, * * * can adequately realize the important change which has been effected in these respects within the past few years, or fully appreciate the superiority and efficiency of our own system of instruction.”

Language similar to the above will be found in the yearly reports of every Superintendent or Board of Education throughout the country; and its wisdom is acknowledged by the appropriation of munificent sums for the erection of buildings on the most approved plans, with a view to the greatest accommodation, health, comfort, and advancement of the children in their studies, and which are, at the same time, models of architecture in themselves, and monuments of a refined civilization.

It may be assumed, then, as indispensable to the successful operation of any system of Public Instruction, that the schools—and more especially the Primaries—should be placed in buildings constructed specially for the purpose, in order that the health and comfort of the children may be secured, and a proper system of discipline maintained during the hours of study and of relaxation; and, it may be

added, that it is also the imperative duty of every community to see that a *sufficient number* of such houses are built, so as to accommodate *all* its children whose education is not otherwise provided for. To educate a portion of our youth, and permit the rest to grow up in ignorance and vice, is unjust to ourselves and to posterity. The public welfare and the security of our institutions in the future, demand that every effort should be made on our part to educate our children, in order to prevent the fearful increase of crime, immorality, and degradation, which inevitably arise from idleness and a want of education; and we shall be considered recreant to our duty, as good citizens and enlightened Christians, if we permit such a state of things to continue as is briefly shown in the following extracts from a memorial presented to Congress at its last session, 1857-'58:

“The number of children (in the city of Washington) between the ages of five and eighteen, is *ten thousand six hundred and ninety-seven*.

“*Three thousand three hundred and twenty-eight* of this number are in Private Schools.

“*Two thousand four hundred* are in Public Schools.

“*Five thousand and sixty-nine* are in no Schools at all!

“The Public Schools cannot accommodate twenty-five per cent. of the number of children of the city.”

Well may it be said, in the words of the memorial, that “the simple statement of the above facts, carefully ascertained, sends its warning voice through all ranks of society, foretelling, with unerring certainty, the black catalogue of crime which ignorance will surely bring on this city as the thousands of uneducated youth develop into manhood.”

There is every reason, therefore, that the cause of Public Education in the city of Washington should be advanced *now* by the erection of suitable buildings, in appropriate localities, with play grounds attached, and capable, if needs be, of accommodating the whole of the ten thousand six hundred and ninety-seven children referred to in the memorial.

There can be no excuse for evading any longer the question thus squarely presented for our serious consideration. On every hand we find, not only in the villages, towns, and cities of our own free and enlightened country—of which we should not forget that our city is the Metropolis—but even amidst the despotisms of the old world, under the very shadow of thrones and feudal palaces, the most encouraging examples of a liberal expenditure for the advancement of Public Education. That we should longer refuse to follow these examples, and continue to be satisfied with things as they are, simply appropriating, from the public revenue, a sum for the maintenance of the entire system scarcely equal to that appropriated elsewhere for supplies of books alone, would indicate a degree of culpable negligence and listless indifference to our best interests, entirely unworthy of a free and enlightened people.

The following Tabular Statement is presented here as an evidence of the handsome manner in which the systems of other cities and

towns are supported ; and it will be seen that the comparison is by no means favorable to our city. It shows the sum expended in each city for Public Schools, the assessed value of the property, and the amount of population.

For its compilation, the Board is mainly indebted to the worthy Principal of the Union Academy, and to public spirited officers and individuals in the cities named ; and for the data in relation to New Orleans, to a distinguished Professor of Louisiana, now connected with the Department of State.

	For Public Schools.	Real Estate.	Population.
Baltimore, Md.....	\$212,300 00	\$80,237,960	230,000
Boston, Mass.....	254,538 00	213,310,067	160,000
Charleston, S. C.....	39,649 00	22,274,175	60,000
Chicago, Ill.....	60,744 00	30,175,325	125,000
Cincinnati, Ohio.....	116,200 00	56,275,430	160,186
Cleveland, Ohio.....	34,615 00	16,498,202	41,196
Detroit, Mich.....	23,611 60	14,202,506	70,000
Lowell, Mass.....	51,000 00	16,866,919	37,553
Lynn, Mass.....	25,432 00	4,148,989	15,713
Memphis, Tenn.....	21,486 72	12,000,000	17,589
Nashville, Tenn.....	25,000 00	11,754,905	25,000
New Bedford, Mass.....	34,295 00	14,489,266	20,389
New Haven, Conn.....	25,388 60	12,481,475	28,143
New York city.....	1,000,000 00	-----	750,000
Philadelphia.....	456,089 00	155,260,000	500,000
Pittsburg, Penn.....	53,837 58	10,000,000	60,000
Portland, Maine.....	26,152 59	12,617,929	28,418
Providence, R. I.....	75,545 16	36,317,000	47,785
Roxbury, Mass.....	31,738 00	13,613,731	18,477
St. Louis, Mo.....	50,000 00	39,397,186	100,000
Springfield, Mass.....	17,000 00	6,375,453	13,788
Washington, D. C.....	20,950 00	30,000,000	65,000
Wilmington, Del.....	12,789 20	6,865,486	20,000
Worcester, Mass.....	24,700 00	11,085,506	22,286

The above statistics refer principally to 1857, a few going back two or three years. They include, however, only the amounts appropriated for the *current expenses* of Public Schools, and do *not* embrace what is appropriated for *new school buildings, &c.*, which item alone would, in many cases, increase the amount fifty per cent.

The aggregate expense of Schools for the four Districts into which the city of New Orleans is divided, for the year 1850-'51, was \$208,057, made up of the amount received from the State and the poll tax, \$71,302, and the amount supplied by city taxation to the deficit, \$136,755. This whole amount of \$208,057, expended for the public education of 12,248 children, includes the payment of teachers, the rent of houses—where, in some of the wards, the Districts do not own them—the purchase of all books, stationery, fuel, and so forth.

But, from this amount of \$208,057 must be deducted some \$27,000 for the support of six High Schools in the 1st, 2d, and 4th Districts. Hence, gross amount expended for Common Schools in the four

Districts of the city of New Orleans.....	\$208,057
Deduct for support of six High Schools	27,000
Amount expended for Common School education	<u>\$181,057</u>

As, however, the 400 attendants at the High Schools must be deducted from this exhibit, we have 11,848 children receiving Common School education at an average cost for tuition, books, stationery, &c., of \$15 per annum for each pupil.

The data embraced in the two following tabular statements are copied from the 29th Annual Report of the Commissioners of Public Schools of the city of Baltimore, 1858. Those in relation to Washington are added by way of comparison. The first shows the number of pupils instructed in all the Public Schools of Philadelphia and Baltimore, the amounts expended for their instruction, with the cost per annum for each pupil; the second, the cost of buildings for the use of Public Schools in the cities of Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore.

	No. of Pupils.	Cost for Tuition.	Rate per Pupil.
Philadelphia, 1850.....	54,383	\$336,979 54	\$7 42
Baltimore, 1854.	9,717	72,509 32	7 46
Washington, 1857.....	2,414	13,950 00	5 78
Cost of buildings in Boston.....		\$1,358,500 00	
New York.....		722,420 17	
Philadelphia		858,224 87	
Baltimore.....		140,458 98	
Washington.....		10,000 00	

As an instance of the manner in which the cause of Public Instruction is fostered and protected in Europe, the following "Brief account of the national provision for education, in the little kingdom of Saxony," may be quoted from the "Sixteenth Annual Report of the Board of Education of the City of New York."

"Saxony has a population about half as large as that of the State of New York, and in territorial extent the whole kingdom is about one-third as large as that portion of our State north of the Mohawk river, and resembles that portion of the State in its rude, cold, and impracticable character. It is several degrees farther north than Quebec. It has one university, (Leipsic,) with eighty-five professors and one thousand students; six academies of the arts and medicine, with forty-three professors and teachers, and fourteen hundred pupils; eleven colleges, with fifteen hundred and ninety pupils; six higher schools; three special institutes for commerce and military affairs; nine teachers' seminaries, with three hundred and sixty-two pupils; seventeen higher industrial or technical schools, with seven hundred and seventy-nine pupils; sixty-nine lower technical schools, with seven thousand pupils; twenty-four schools for lace-making, with one thousand nine hundred and twenty-eight pupils; and two thousand one hundred and fifty-five common schools, with two hundred and seventy-eight thousand pupils. There is no country in the world that makes so generous a provision for the various and useful educa-

tion of all her people; and those who visit Saxony see everywhere the evidence of the rich return for this outlay in the perfection and variety of her industrial productions, of useful and fine and ornamental art, and in the good morals, good order, thrift, comfort, intelligence, and contentment of the universal people.

"This remarkable educational prosperity is to be attributed, in a great degree, to the strict enforcement of the wise laws of a nation so enlightened. Each parent is, by law, obliged to send his children to school from their sixth to their fourteenth year. 'The Saxons,' says Mr. Kay, 'consider the education of young children as a matter of primary importance, to which all else must be made to give way.' The morality and the liberty, as well as the social and physical condition of the people, are all considered to be dependent on the early and full development of their moral and intellectual faculties; and, since the revolution of 1848, the education in all the Primary Schools has been made perfectly gratuitous, so that every parent can send his children to any school, free of all expense. In that enlightened community, education is considered in its true light—as a public want, and rated at its true value—as above all price."

Thus it will be seen that everywhere else the most munificent provisions are made for the support and advancement of Public Education, and with the most gratifying results. It behooves us, therefore, as citizens of the metropolis of our country, to shake off the lethargy which oppresses us, and bestow all our energies upon a subject of so much importance to our present and future welfare.

The *manner* of raising the revenue necessary for the erection of suitable buildings is a matter for public thought and discussion; and the Board of Trustees simply present the subject for that purpose, with the suggestion that the question be discussed in ward or other meetings, in order that some general plan may be adopted to secure the end in view. One branch of the National Legislature has already passed a bill of relief, and there is every reason to hope for its success before the other; but, unless seconded by our own united and earnest efforts, the benefits accruing to us from the final passage of this bill will be but partial; in calling upon Hercules for assistance, we should first put our own shoulder to the wheel.

In presenting this address to their fellow-citizens, the Trustees are actuated solely by a sense of their official responsibilities as Guardians of the interests of the Public Schools. They feel that it is indispensable, at this time, to urge upon their fellow-citizens the necessity for some prompt action in behalf of the cause of Public Instruction, and they seek to arouse them to a just appreciation of its advantages, and to induce them to take a greater interest in its objects. That the Schools are almost entirely neglected by the people, is evident from the fact, that *it is a very rare thing to find parents or guardians visiting the schools in which their children are being educated*. For this indifference to a matter of such momentous importance, it is difficult to account.

For this apathy on the part of the people, the Trustees can have no remedy. They cannot force parents to do that which seems to be so

distasteful to them. They have, however, the consciousness of performing their duty in thus calling public attention to the subject; and can only await the result of the investigation, which they feel assured it will receive from an enlightened community.

JNO. D. BRANDT,
R. B. IRNSIDE,
M. H. MILLER,
S. YORKE AT LEE.

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